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The Rain Dropped

● Charles Angoff

The rain dropped
And dropped in needles
That bounced back
Furiously and then
Collapsed.

The rain dropped
And dropped
And loneliness and shadows
Came to the prickly road.

My heart became hollow.
Soon all time and space
Came in and filled it
With coldness.

The rain dropped
And dropped.
And now my heart
Eased and a slow warmth
Came to it.
And the song of eternity
Warmed it more
And more.

And the rain dropped
And dropped.

No Wider Than the Heart

• Rosanne Smith Robinson

ELLEN sat in the seat next to the window and watched the big rain drops collide with the pane as the streamliner raced and swayed through the winter sparseness of the Indiana countryside. The sky was a vivid grey but it was light enough now so that she could no longer see her reflection in the window. With a rap loud enough to have been made by a fingernail flicked against the glass, a blob of rain hit, trembled a moment and then started to course down the pane. If that drop runs all the way down, she said to herself, she'll die. But the drop zig-zagged, joined its force with several other drops, and the tiny stream leaked down out of sight. Then the lights inside the coach blinked on and her own image leapt up beside her.

In less than an hour she would be in Indianapolis. She had spent an irritating night trying to force herself past the first warm edge of sleep, but at best she had only dozed, started into wakefulness and then dozed again. Her stockings were bagged out of shape and twisted on her legs, and a nerve under her left eye kept jumping. She had known, after the first phone call from Tom saying that Grandmother had fallen, that either she or Mary would have to go out. The exasperating thing was that Mary had said at first that she would go. Then she had called back that night with a handful of excuses that Ellen could not stop. Vincent

had just got a job out of town, the baby was sick and none of the relatives would take care of Stevie because he was such a handful. When Mary had finally offered to send a check to help out with the traveling expenses, there had been nothing to do but give in as gracefully as possible.

"You might as well go out and get it over with," John had said when he came home that night. "Dickie and I can manage all right. Try to talk her into going to a nursing home. And for heaven's sake, don't let her get you all upset."

Ellen had packed in a rage of resentment. It was unfair that the old woman was still alive. Born the youngest of the thirteen children of an enterprising farmer, Sarah had always been sickly. "Poor Sarah," everyone had said, "she won't live long." And here she was, just brimming over ninety. She had outlived her only child, all her brothers and sisters, and one grandchild.

Ellen was twelve when her family had moved from the south to stay with the old woman because Ellen's father had lost his business and there was no place else to go. They had come from a grey, raining world into the deeper gloom of the house. And there perched on the over-stuffed couch, her feet not quite touching the floor, had sat, as though on a throne, the little bird-like woman with fluttery, bony hands and glittery eyes. She had been in her seventies then. She had clutched at Ellen and Mary,

and it had been all that the girl could do not to draw back in horror from the old woman.

For two years they had lived with Grandmother — two years in which the grass was not to be stepped on, the cellar must be hosed and swept twice a week, the windows washed on sunny Saturday mornings, the whole house turned out each week as if it were spring. And always Sarah had sat perched on the couch, occasionally doing painstaking darning, still threading the needle without using her glasses. In the late afternoon she would read through the death notices in the afternoon paper, looking up any terms which she did not know in the medical dictionary that had belonged to her husband.

Ellen had slept in a little unheated sleeping porch where, in the winter, she often shivered and shook for half an hour before she grew warm enough to go to sleep. She was the first up and raced from the house without breakfast, often arriving at school before the doors had been unlocked by the janitor. She invariably stayed at school as late as she could, and then dawdled her way home. The house and the old woman were *hateful* to her.

When Ellen's family had finally moved to a house of their own, Grandmother came for dinner every Sunday. Ellen found it hard to look at her. She could not look at that face with its air of injured patience and at the sunken mouth without the thought — the wish — for death coming like a swallow to her mind. "She'll live forever," Ellen's mother would say. "She's had practically everything out. What could go wrong with her?" Her tombstone was already up at Crown

Hill, her name and the date of her birth already engraved on the marker.

But instead, Ellen's mother, a robust woman with great, strong teeth and an indomitable hold on life, had died, and Ellen spent the summer before she went away to college living with Grandmother again. She had spoken to her only when she had to, and when Sarah had asked her querulously where she was going, she would force the tightlipped, hating reply, "Out."

After that she spent her summers with her father out in Montana where he was working. They visited Sarah at Christmas, eating cheerless holiday dinners in restaurants. Always they drove Sarah out to Crown Hill where the old woman mooned about the graves almost longingly. Ellen hated the cemetery, and these visits made her almost ill. Then she had married soon after she got out of school, and her father had come to visit her. She had not seen Grandmother again until Roger's funeral. Her brother was many years older than Ellen and she had hardly known him, but she had resented the sight of her grandmother standing before her grandson's coffin.

Two years later on a sunny November day another call had come. She felt her heart jump when the operator said "Indianapolis calling," and she had thought almost triumphantly "Well, the old girl's finally given up." But it had been her father this time. Retired, he had moved to Indianapolis to take care of his aged mother, and he had dropped dead on the dining room floor with the glass of milk he was taking to her in his hand. Grandmother had called the next door

neighbor, Mrs. Cohn, who had found her standing over her son, poking him with her toe and saying, "Get up, Charles. Get up. You've spilt milk all over the floor."

Ellen clenched her fist at the memory and closed her eyes. The old woman had become a sinister symbol to her now. There was one grave plot left in the family lot at the cemetery. Ellen and Mary had kidded about it. "I don't want it," Ellen had told Mary. "You take it."

"I've made other plans," Mary would say.

But there it was—a patch of ground that had become a superstitious omen to Ellen. She thought about it sometimes at night lying wakeful, listening to planes droning over the great city where she lived. By God, she would think, why doesn't she die. It was as if she were involved in some game of chance: if the old woman would just die, then she would be safe. She felt all the guiltier because she knew that she and her sister would be her grandmother's heirs. And now when she thought of the old woman she would grow angry that the money was there complicating the death wish she held for her. The money seemed to taint the purity of her hatred.

The porter tapped her on the shoulder just as she felt the train go into a long glide followed by the lurch of braking. The train had reached the fringe of the grim, colorless city.

She had the cab wait while she ran into the house and left her bag. When she had called Gladys McKean, who was the mother of a high school friend now married and living in the South, she had not

known what train she would take, and she wasn't surprised to find that Gladys was out. Ellen gave her bag to the maid and told her she would call later from the hospital.

The rain had settled into a fine drizzle, and as Ellen settled back into the cab she felt herself shivering with the unaccustomed dampness of the Middle Western cold. It was a cold that penetrated and made her feel more miserable than a biting wind could have done. The tires of the cab sang in the wetness, and as she looked out at the streets down which she had walked so many times, she made a conscious effort to remember what she had been like then and found that she could not.

Ellen paused in the lobby of the hospital and then decided to call Dr. Harolds before she went to the room, and to let Tom, the distant cousin who was Sarah's great-nephew, know that she had arrived. It was Tom and his wife who looked in on the old woman each week and helped her with taxes and whatever business affairs she could not manage by herself. Ellen had met him she was sure, but she could not remember what he looked like.

Dr. Harolds was an elderly man who had relinquished much of his practice to a son. Ellen arranged to meet him at the hospital the next morning. "She's just not giving us any cooperation," he said over the phone in a slow nasal voice. "She won't do anything we ask, so there's no use her staying there any longer than necessary. She says her back doesn't hurt her, but that's because she wants to leave. Dr. Kelly—he's the bone man—I'll call him

and have him drop by there with the X-rays in the morning."

Tom's voice sounded soft and hurt. "We just can't do a thing with her," he said. Ellen promised to meet him at the hospital at seven.

Then deliberately postponing the ordeal, Ellen went into the hospital drug store and ordered, and slowly drank, a cup of coffee. This was the same hospital where her mother had died, and the few times she had been in it since, she had been able to catch faint traces of the sick sweetish smell of cancer that had clung to her mother's room as thickly as dripping honey. She took the elevator to the second floor and walked down the corridor, conscious of the loudness of her own footsteps, to her grandmother's room. A screen blocked any view of the bed, and the nurse sitting in a chair across from the door jumped up animatedly and came out to the hall.

She was a plump, pleasant-faced woman with very blue eyes. "You're the granddaughter," the nurse said. "She's been telling me all morning that you were coming to take her home. We had a time with her this morning. Dr. Kelly tried to show her the X-ray, and she was just clapping her hands and singing away and wouldn't listen to a word he said. He practically yelled at her, he got so mad." The nurse smiled gently as if she were recollecting the escapade of a naughty but lovable child.

Ellen learned from the nurse that there was an orthopedic ward for elderly patients on the same floor in another wing of the hospital.

"She'd get good care there," the nurse said, "but I don't know as she'd want to go. How old is she anyway?"

"She's ninety-one," Ellen said, drawing the numeral out impressively.

"Great heavens," the nurse said. "Why she's practically a monument. She wouldn't tell the doctors nothing 'cept she was over eighty. Ninety-one! Well, heavens to Betsy."

Ellen was smiling at the nurse's amazement when they heard the thin, familiarly querulous voice call out, "Who it is? Is that you, Ellen?"

The moment had come. There was now no escaping. Ellen walked slowly into the room. I'm a cold-hearted bitch, she thought, and then she caught sight of the slight figure on the high hospital bed. Bars were up on both sides of the bed. The nurse caught Ellen's look. "She tries to get out of bed at night," she explained. "I think if she had her shoes and clothes here, she'd just get up and go home. Wouldn't you, Mrs. Townsend?"

But the old woman was looking at Ellen. Her face, still remarkably unwrinkled, lighted up, and she pulled her thin arms out from under the stiff covers and stretched them toward Ellen. Ellen was astounded to feel tears start in her own eyes. She felt still numb and guarded. The tears came as a sort of reflex action. The old woman was as thin as a dying reed and her white hair, which looked like spun silk, was thin. Her body had reached a state of final economy. Only the bones and muscles and skin were left, and to Ellen's mind came the quick vivid picture of a sailing ship, shorn of all ballast, as it headed into a storm to do battle for its fragile life.

"Hello, Grandmother," she said and she moved quickly into the

range of those skeletal arms. She pressed her lips against the forehead which was so dry that it seemed that she was kissing fine, powdery dust.

Ellen stood by the bed and listened to the old woman's recital of complaints. The nurse had left the room and Sarah continually cautioned Ellen not to discuss anything with anyone. Ellen was simply to arrange to take her home tomorrow.

"But Grandmother," Ellen said, and found herself speaking in a firm clear voice and looking directly into the old woman's eyes, "you can't stay alone any more, you know."

"Why not?" Sarah asked, and Ellen was amused to see that she was actually feigning surprise.

"You know perfectly well why not," she said. "You've got to take it easy until your back is better."

"Oh," Sarah said. The birdlike movements that had always seemed affected in her before were now appropriate to her delicate frame. "Well, I wouldn't want someone I didn't know." She spoke in a supple voice.

"I'll find someone you'll like," Ellen said, "and when you're sure you can get around all right again, you can get rid of her. But you've got to promise to keep her for a month. They won't come for less than a month."

She knew Sarah knew she was lying, and she knew she would accept the lie.

"You're tired now," Ellen said. "Get some rest. I'll be back tonight."

"Yes, I'm tired," the old woman said, and she started to cry but no tears came. Suddenly Ellen felt desperately ashamed. "I'm so glad you're here," Sarah said.

"Everything's going to be all right," Ellen said, and it was easy to kiss that dry forehead again.

On her way out of the hospital she stopped by the orthopedic ward and looked in. A cursory glance was enough: six beds jammed into a room and four vacant-eyed old women so lost in their timeless reveries that they did not bother to glance up. Ellen shivered and turned away.

After dinner the McKears lost themselves in television with the fascination of babies watching a ball of twine unwound for the first time. She borrowed their car to drive back to the hospital.

She remembered Tom the minute she saw him in the corridor outside of Sarah's room. He was a sandy-complexioned man and had the bulging forehead of Sarah's family. He seemed worried and upset and very much in awe of the old woman. Ellen began to realize that she was not simply putting in an appearance for convention's sake. Whatever was going to be done, she would have to do.

"How long can you stay?" Tom asked her after they had talked to Sarah a few minutes.

Ellen took a deep breath and said, "I'll have to leave on Monday."

"That's not much time," Tom said, looking depressed.

"Oh," Sarah said, "she's got a family. She can't stay here. She's got to get home. Bless her heart for coming."

My God, thought Ellen, can this be true or am I losing my mind. The old woman was at last willing to bargain. In order to get home she was willing to accept any lies, make any concession that helped her toward that goal.

When she arrived the next morning, Dr. Harolds was already in the room. He was holding a large sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Well," he said after shaking hands with Ellen, "she's let the nurse go. It's all right now, I guess, but I do feel having a nurse here all the time saved her life. She started to go into shock, you know. You can see when right here on the temperature chart.

Harolds was a man in his seventies, and he talked with a slight embarrassment and without looking at Ellen, as though he were addressing a group of deformed or crippled people. Sarah was shaking her head and clasping her skinny hands together again and again.

"Well now," Dr. Harolds went on, "we didn't want to put her in a cast. At her age, you know, she might get hemostatic pneumonia and bed sores, but she's still got a lot of pain. Here I'll show you." He moved to the side of the bed and slid his hands under the old woman's back. The old woman looked up at him.

"Doesn't that hurt?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"Well," he said, moving back to the end of the bed. "It certainly hurt yesterday." He turned back to Ellen. "Now Dr. Kelly thinks this may have been an old vertebrae fracture and this fall sort of shook some of the calcification loose. Now her heart's enlarged but at her age, of course, it would be. I don't think there's as much chance now of her getting pneumonia but —"

Sarah had started clapping her hands and singing to herself to shut out the sound of the doctor's voice.

"You'll have to be quiet and behave yourself, Mrs. Townsend. I'm

trying to tell your granddaughter about your case, since you wouldn't listen," Harolds said crossly.

Ellen felt a rising sense of anger and awareness. He's afraid of her, she thought to herself. He's actually afraid of her because she should be dead and she's not. And because he was afraid, he was standing there torturing her with details that he would never dream of disclosing to a younger patient — not even a patient of seventy or eighty. Longevity now was her single achievement, and the only prize she could collect was death. Ellen realized how closely the old woman had been living with death all these years. She had resigned herself to it some thirty years ago, and still that monumental heart went on beating, beating. For her, death came not in an occasional thought or anxiety but was borne on every second, with the winking of a light, the lowering of a shade. And this man stood there rubbing her nose in it.

Ellen walked out of the room. In a minute the startled doctor followed her.

"Thank you so much, Dr. Harolds," she said. "We'll let you know what we decide and I'll call you."

He gave her a puzzled nod and walked away.

Back in the room, Ellen patted the old woman's hand. "He won't bother you again," she said.

"You know," Sarah said plaintively, "sometimes I think I'll just go to the country to get away from his voice."

Her face lighted with surprised pleasure at Ellen's laughter.

Ellen spent most of Sunday interviewing applicants who answered

the ad she had put in the paper for a companion for a semi-invalid. She had already investigated all of the nursing homes that were recommended and had come to the conclusion that they were not the answer. None of them was actually dirty and none of them was really clean. They were staffed by nurses who rouged too heavily and wore brightly colored handkerchiefs in their uniform pockets like beauty operators. All of the establishments had the appearance of private homes turned into emergency stations in a countryside stricken by flood and disaster.

"I'd die just to get out of one of them," Ellen told Gladys McKean. When her grandmother died, she would do it on her own without any outside help.

Late in the afternoon, she called the woman she had finally decided to hire. She was an easy-going Kentuckian who had lived for two years with an elderly woman. Ellen had painted the job in dire colors and the woman, a Mrs. Green, had seemed unperturbed at the same time that she had asked practical questions about shopping, cleaning, and emergencies. After exacting a promise from her that she would stay on the job for at least a month, Ellen told her to come to her Grandmother's house on Monday morning.

She called an ambulance and arranged for Sarah to be picked up at ten in the morning and rang up the doctor so that he could sign the release in the morning. Then she took a cab to the station to pick up a reservation on an early afternoon train and went out to the hospital.

Sarah had eaten and was asleep. Ellen tiptoed to the edge of the bed and looked down at her. She could

see her pulse throbbing slowly in the ridge-like veins of her skull. The incredibility of this woman's age struck her at that moment with a tickling, thrilling sensation up and down her spine. This woman had been born before the Civil War. Through decades that had brought changes almost impossible to comprehend or to imagine, that heart had gone on throbbing and pulsing, and its owner, intent only on her own narrow destiny, survived spiritually almost unchanged. Self-consciously Ellen realized that she was staring down at her grandmother with the same bemused look she had often seen on the faces of pleased relatives gazing through the glass windows of hospital nurseries.

Leaning over, she shook Sarah's shoulder gently. The old woman moved reluctantly out of her reverie.

"The ambulance is coming at ten, tomorrow morning," she said. "We're taking you home. Now go back to sleep." She tiptoed out before Sarah could answer.

She dined with an old friend that night and although they talked with the old easy familiarity, there was none of the wordless intimacy that had existed between them when they were adolescents together. Ellen was glad to get away, and when she got into bed that night, she felt a curious subdued excitement not unlike the feeling she remembered from childhood on the eve of an unexpected holiday.

Sarah was lying fully dressed on the bed when Ellen walked into her room. She wore a look of angelic triumph as she was trundled down the hospital corridor on the ambulance stretcher. "Good-bye," she sang out to the nurses. "Good-bye, forever." Ellen found herself grin-

ning foolishly.

The ambulance eased up in front of the house, and Mrs. Green opened the door, smiling out at them like a jovial washerwoman.

"Oh, dear," Sarah said, "she's letting all that cold air in."

Ellen followed the stretcher into the house aware that half the neighborhood was peering out from behind curtains. Perhaps, she thought, I should make a speech from the porch or bow or wave. The ambulance attendants lifted Sarah skillfully on to the great couch, and before the door was shut on them, Sarah started giving orders.

"That chair goes over there," she said peremptorily to Mrs. Green. "Ellen, open the piano up. I never played the piano but I always open it up every morning. No, the stool goes out a little. I expect everything needs dusting."

Ellen felt a flush of irritation.

"I can see you're glad to be home," Mrs. Green said.

And as Ellen looked at the old woman, doll-like on the couch, there seemed already settled upon her the air of one who had never been away. In two weeks she would probably claim that she had never fallen, never gone to the hospital.

Ellen walked over to her. "I'd better do some shopping for you," she said. "Have you got any cash?"

"Oh, I don't need anything," Sarah said.

"Well, you can't starve Mrs. Green," Ellen said.

"Oh," Sarah said and reached reluctantly for her pocketbook. "Well," she said slowly, "will a dollar be enough?"

"No," Ellen said good-humoredly. "A dollar will not be enough?"

"Oh," Sarah said again and took

her time about fishing out a ten dollar bill from her large leather handbag.

Ellen walked down the street to the big triangle lot where a supermarket had been built. The lot had been vacant and overgrown when she first lived here, and she had chased butterflies and fireflies there in the summer and tramped across it with her sled in the winter to go belly-flopping down Watson Hill. It was the first time she had remembered that in years. That Christmas Sarah had given her a chemistry set and she had set up a lab in the cellar and labored passionately to produce a secret formula compounded of Worcestershire sauce and baking soda. Strange how one forgot.

She shopped and struggled back to the house with ten dollars and five cents worth of groceries. That was probably more food than had been in the house since the whole family had lived there during the depression.

While her grandmother lunched, Ellen went to the McKears to pick up her bag and say her good-byes. While she was gone Tom called to say that he would come that evening to move a bed downstairs. Everything was taken care of, it seemed. Sensing Sarah's impatience for her to leave, Ellen went to the phone and called a cab.

"Well, Grandmother," she said a little over-heartily, "I want you to behave yourself now."

"Oh, don't worry about me," Sarah said.

Ellen stood in the center of the room and she knew that the next time she stood there, the old woman would be dead. It might be years but she felt she would not come

here again. Now that the time was come, she wanted to ask Sarah a thousand questions. She remembered the rage she used to fly into when her mother told her that she looked like Sarah. She was bigger, of course, but there was a resemblance.

The cab horn beeped, and Ellen leaned down and kissed Sarah on the mouth. "Good-bye," she said. "Now you can take your nap."

Sarah nodded and closed her eyes. She was as glad to have her go as she had been to see her come. There was no need for more effort. With a wave of her hand to Mrs. Green, Ellen picked up her bag and went out, closing the door firmly behind her. For the first time she

felt a relatedness to the old woman. And she knew she would worry no more about bad omens. She felt a curious sense of strength. It seemed she had never been so alive.

She walked down the narrow cement path and handed the suitcase to the driver and eased sideways into the back seat of the cab. She was going to be dreadfully early for the train. The cab pulled away from the curb, and she let herself relax and give way to the pull of motion. And then from somewhere, as though someone else had pushed a button that released her, she heard her voice saying to the driver, "I want to go to Crown Hill first, driver. I'll show you the way when we get there."

On an August Marriage

● John Knoepfle

There is no wisdom for
Paired butterflies released
In autumn fields or honey-
Combed hexagonals.
Lovers shy as touched
And kindled fingers
Burn the world's old book.
What news to them the words
Taken from the Greek:
How desolate the hive
Abandoned is, how
Fragile wings in winter
Bear their sunburst then.
Who can tell them only
Water fills the jars
Whose cup in common yields
The rare and richer wine.

A Rose by Any Other Name

● J. Patrick Hurley, S.J.

DR. CHARLES PAUSON snapped on his small desk-radio that covered in the glooming shadow of the IBM. He wanted the weather report, but he tuned up the end of some symphony and settled back to wait, frowning at Friday's schedule. The giant mechanical brain brooded silently over his shoulder. Friday was going to be less rewarding than today. Dr. Sacco with his confounded thesis was signed up for most of the morning. It had something to do with chickens: those that lay eggs and those that don't. Kindall wasn't scheduled, but he would be around in the afternoon. It was the end of the week. Kindall always came in at the end of the week with his parimutuel odds vaguely disguised as a problem of organic mutations in the prolific fruit-fly. What a prostitution of talent! A million dollar brain had more important things to think about.

Charlie Pauson didn't hear the radio. He was not aware of a flicker of light deep inside the brain. He had more important things to think about, too. He picked up a letter he had received that morning. This was more like it. This was progress:

Dear Sir:

The Committee for Applied Science was pleased and encouraged by the performance of the electronic brain during the recent election. We feel that the public has now been sufficiently prepared for a more scientific approach to

our national problem of suffrage. Therefore, our committee will propose a bill to the members of the 85th Congress that will, in effect, disenfranchise everyone, with the exception of 9,000 carefully selected voters in Hartford, Connecticut. In the next general election, after these 9,000 ballots have been cast and counted, the IBM will be designated by law to project the results for the rest of the country. This procedure should . . . We look to you for . . . Enormous savings in time, energy, and money . . .

The symphony churned on. The strange light grew and undulated through the brain.

Charlie Pauson swung back and forth in his swivel-chair. He didn't realize he was keeping time to the music. "We look to you for . . ." He was eager to serve. He was a tight-fitting little mathematician with a passion for applying science, for tying up the loose ends in the world, for expressing the messiness of things in simple, neat formulas. He was a man perpetually plugged-in, and it was difficult to say just who was an extension of which: Charlie of the machine, or the machine of Charlie.

The symphony suddenly crashed in an awful cadenza. The professor started. He caught the weird reflection in the window opposite him, spun around, and stared at the glowing brain. The room shuddered with the music. There was a pierc-

ing flash — then a calm puff of white smoke from somewhere down in the guts of the machine. Pauson jumped from his seat. He slammed off the radio and rushed for the control box. He fumbled through the systematic tangle of buttons and levers. But everything was in order. Everything was in perfect order. It must have been an illusion. His eyes, magnified by the heavy glasses, looked out and around his triangular nose — checking — double-checking.

Should he call for maintenance? No, no, it was too late. They were all at home. But he simply had to know, and know immediately. He acted. The brain came to life slowly. The lights flashed and blinked. A few test signals, a satisfactory response, and he was relieved. Whatever it had been, the brain was intact. He glared at the desk and the silent radio. Still shaking, he reordered his scattered papers, placed them in his brief-case, picked up his hat and coat, and departed.

The next morning he was again the mathematician, calmed and cooled to absolute zero. There was no reason to give the flash or the smoke a second thought, or to mention it to anyone. He set right to work transmitting a series of equations. The brain took them with ease. "Chickens," he muttered, "More nonsense." But the brain clucked away and blinked winningly from each if its thousand eyes. The problem was solved. With a little concern, but with hardly enough attention, Pauson recorded the answer: $a/r-o-s-e/i-s/a-r-o-s-e/i-s/a/r-o-s-e$. An unattached assistant was sent off with it.

In five minutes the assistant was back leading a flushed and panting

full-professor. Charlie Pauson was apprehensive and turned pale when he recognized his memo paper shaking helplessly in the geneticist's angry hand.

"Doctor Pauson," Professor Sacco said, as he confronted the mathematician and his brain, "this is not just an error."

Pauson collapsed in his chair. Something was wrong.

"This is a deliberate effort on your part to ridicule Genetics. This is not an offense against me. This is a slur on the name of science."

"Doctor, I don't understand."

"Listen to me, Pauson. I want my equations solved, and I want them solved right now."

Pauson was coming untied. He snatched at the paper, scanned it furiously, and compared it with the original problem. He was horrified at the discrepancy. The machine had erred. He would have to call for maintenance after all. "Dr. Sacco," he began slowly, "this, of course, is a serious error. There was some trouble here last night . . ."

"It's no error!" shouted Sacco. "It's a pome! A pome from some idiotic English book. Your own boy here confessed it. He said it was a pome."

Now Pauson became indignant. "Doctor, that is a lot of bother!" He bent himself over the paper again. The formula suddenly looked up at him and shouted: $a/rose/is/a/rose/is/a/rose$. He lifted his head. The eyes of the two scientists met. Their brows questioned each other.

Pauson was up motioning the geneticist toward the brain. They gaped at the answer that was still recorded there.

"This is some sort of trick, I know!" Sacco was angry again.

"Doctor, this was produced quite spontaneously by the machine."

"Incredible!"

"I'll prove it!" said Pauson. "Hand me the equation." The giant blinked. The identical formula reappeared. Sacco was confused. "Well, whatever it is," he said half-apologetically, "it is not the solution to my equation, Doctor."

Charlie Pauson had a great faith in numbers. He counted to ten. It usually helped. "That is evident," he replied evenly, "but whatever it is, neither is it poetry." This last observation was not nearly so evident to either of them, but Sacco was cowed. He left, and Pauson visualized him flying around the science-quadrangle with the depressing news that the brain was no longer reliable.

Then Charlie called for help. He called for the maintenance crew, and he called Kindall. Kindall would think of something. Then he turned to the brain. Another test couldn't do any harm and might help in the diagnosis. He gathered up some miscellaneous problems from the file on his desk.

X-y-z/3U-rst/v-p/--o-5dx/
. . . . He waited for the result. It came with a shock: letter after letter moving into place with absolute finality: n-o-w/i-s/t-h-e/h-o-o-u-r/o-f/o-u-r/d-i-s-c-o-n-t-e-n-t.

The door flew open. Kindall rushed in leading a charge of electrical engineers.

Pauson stood transfixed. His eyes through the glasses were distended beyond belief.

Through the early morning Charlie ran test after test for the demanding repair men. Each new answer was more disturbing than the last. Something was very wrong. For all

their efforts, they received nothing back but impertinent Shakespearean epigrams. (The assistant who had started the trouble by babbling about that weird woman, Gertrude Somebody-or-other, now stood by vouching for the accuracy of the quotations.)

The crew accomplished nothing with all its turning and tightening of screws. They were dismissed. The matter had assumed the proportions of a major academic scandal. Then Kindall did think of something . . . not much, but something: a policy meeting. A policy meeting should be summoned. The whole family in the quadrangle had a stake in this thing. They were all invited — the sister sciences: physics, and chemistry, biology, and anthropology, even the natural sons: psych and sociology.

Kindall gave them the details. (Pauson, by this time, was a personified loose-end.) The dramatic flare with which he read some of the morning's results only added to the general despair. "Nonsense syllables" was the common opinion. The entire report smacked dangerously of science fiction, they said, and they were interested in facts.

They had to be shown — every last one of them. The appalling demonstration dragged on through the afternoon. Mathematics invariably evoked Shakespeare. The others had to be content, for the most part, with murky moderns: e.e. cummings and Lowell, Frost, Pound, and Eliot. The day wore on. The frustration increased. The brain suddenly changed its pace and became aggressively original, sometimes downright prosey. Its remarks were barbed and personal, possibly because the classics were being mis-

construed.

An old anthropologist, an emeritus fossil called in for consultation, a man who had spent a good lifetime measuring the cranial capacities of anthropoids, was carried out of the building in a state of collapse when he heard the answer to the problem he suggested. The brain responded: The/cranial/capacity/of/anthropologists/is/determined/by/achieving/the/cube/of/any/of/the/six/sides.

Professor Sacco was just as disturbed to learn that: There/are/two/kinds/of/geneticists/those/that/lay/eggs/and/those/that/don't.

Finally, a group of clinical psychologists, with a problem on the incidence of ambidexterity in the maladjusted, were met with this doggerel:

The/maladjusted/octopus
Is/more/than/ambidextrous.
This/fact/I'm/told/annoys/
his/"id"

Which/then/in/turn/annoys/
the/squid.

The meeting was getting out of hand. The mathematicians were blamed. Even Kindall grumbled. If something weren't done fast, he would have to work out the odds on his slide-rule.

Well, what more could be expected from a man like Pauson, who kept a private phone in his own apartment (This fact was easily established) and listened to the radio? Something like this was bound to happen. They all agreed that he should be given the weekend — just two days — in which to find, by hook or crook, which one of the hundred thousand screws was loose.

They left him slumped in his

chair. He mumbled to himself disconnected phrases about roses, and flights of angels, and mending walls; and laced the quotations with snatches from the symphony, which somehow came vividly to mind.

He counted to ten. It was useless. There should be some number a person could count to at a time like this, he thought.

Finally, he gathered up the quotations and started to read them all over again: square-headed anthropologists, geneticists that lay eggs, ambidextrous octopi. That was just about the way he felt. Charlie began to laugh. He hadn't really laughed since he was an undergraduate.

But it was short-lived laughter and had a strange effect. It was natural, almost gay, and in a limited way humanizing. But it made him think again, and that was unfortunate, for he thought in the manner to which his whole life had accustomed him, that is, in terms of circles, and squares, and parallelograms. The two orders would not coalesce. In the end, habit proved stronger than nature.

His mind was directed and intense. He had a plan. Searching through his desk, he found the record of a problem that had been solved correctly the week before. He looked over the answer to make sure: xnt/aknbj/xnt/rsnmdr/xnt/vnqrd/sgzm/rdmrkdrr/sghmfr. He would run it through and compare the two results. Simple, he thought, and yet there was a possibility . . .

The answer — Shakespeare again — almost stopped him, but he was determined . . .

xnt/aknbjr/xnt/rsnmdr/xnt/
vnqrd . . .
you/blocks/you/stones/you/

worse/than/senseless/things.

He had found the screw. He was sure of it.

Off came the metal plate surrounding the recording area. Inside there were a hundred wheels on a great axle. The brain was a scientific wonder, a million dollar slot-machine. But around each wheel, instead of cherries and bells, there were scientific signs and all the letters of the alphabet.

Pauson was right. The axle, and along with it the wheels, had slipped one gear—only one. Instead of x, it registered y; instead of n, it registered o; instead of t, u; instead of a, b; and so on.

The adjustment was elementary. The difficulty had been mechanical after all. A simple matter of applied science. The poor man was liberated. He forgot Shakespeare, and the symphony sank into the subconscious under the weight of a new equation.

Charlie Pauson took up another old problem for the final test.

He stood with precision as he transmitted. He listened. His mind clicked in unison with the brain. His glasses winked back in a reflection of the thousand eyes.

The answer was perfectly correct:
z/qnrd/ax/zmx/nsgdq/mzld . . .

The Wind

• Charles Angoff

The wind swoops
Over the grass,
Up the hill,
Through the trees,
On to the lake.
Where it suddenly stops
For a brief, fierce dance,
And twirls again coquettishly,
And smiles and bows
And leaps
Into eternity.

What sweet secret
Does it bear
That makes
This moment
So rare?

A Harp Makes Sweet Music

● Leon Odell Griffith

WHEN there is a fire blazing in the fireplace (with the fat knots of pine oozing pitch and the oak glowing in the back next to the brick) and the old clock on the mantel over the fireplace ticks its solemn old-age song of time-dying in tiny fragments, there's nothing for you to do except dream (if you are in the room alone) or (if there are others) make music We were all in the room together.

Nolan said, "If I had a harp we could make music. You could play your guitar and I could blow the harp and we could make music together."

Missy said, "It's not a harp. It's a harmonica. I don't know why you call it a harp."

Nolan did not answer her. But Mama said, "We've always called it a harp."

"If I had a harp, Hans, you and me could make music," Nolan said.

"Nolan used to blow the harp real well," Mama said.

Missy looked at the ceiling and said nothing.

I watched a blob of pitch run out of a pine knot, run along the belly of the knot and fall spitting into the fire. Nolan cleared his throat. Mama picked up her needle and began sewing. Missy stared straight in front into the fire, but as if she did not see the fire or even know it was there.

"Hans?" Nolan said.

I looked at him.

"Have you got enough money to

buy a harp?"

"I got a quarter," I said.

"A good harp costs a half dollar," he said.

Missy turned and stared at him. "You aren't getting any of my money," she said. "Dad sent it to me and you're not getting any of it; you want it for music, bottled music."

Nolan glanced at her. "A man needn't ask his wife for money," he said.

Missy stared into the fire again. Everyone was quiet, the fire crackled, and finally when it seemed as if someone had to speak (to me it seemed that way), Missy got up from the chair. The chair had a brindle cowhide bottom and the hairs from the bottom had stuck to her skirt. Crinkling up her nose and pulling the corners of her mouth down so that her lips puckered, she pulled the skirt around and began brushing away the hairs.

Brushing she said, "What a mess!"

Mama looked at her but said nothing; Mama was sewing up the straddle of Nolan's underwear. When Missy had finished her brushing, she let out her breath—making it sound like the kettle hissing. Mama looked at her again, and Missy's eyes met Mama's eyes and they looked at each other for a long moment.

"I got hair on my new skirt Dad sent me," Missy said then.

"The hair's coming out of the chair bottom," Mama said. "It's a

good chair but the hair's coming out. Nolan's daddy made the chair; he made it the year before he died."

"It makes a mess out of your clothes," Missy said. And then wobbling her hips the way she did when she was angry and hurrying away from Nolan, she left the room, her heels tapping into the back, to the kitchen.

Mama finished the sewing and tossed the underwear to Nolan. He caught it. "Thanks," he said.

Mama stuck the needle in the edge of her apron and then sat staring into the fire; from the back, the kitchen, Missy's heels were clicking. Once Nolan turned and stared over the back of his chair at the door into the dining room and beyond, the kitchen; then he glanced at the underwear in his hands.

"If I had a harp," he said, "we could make music. Hans, you and me could make music."

"All I got is a quarter," I said.

Mama got up from her chair then and went to her bed which was in the corner of the room. She rolled back the edge of the top mattress and took the knotted handkerchief from between the bedding. She fumbled for a minute and then came back and handed me two quarters.

Nolan said, "I didn't know you had any money."

"I got it from the eggs," she said. "That'll buy the harp, and you and Hans can make music."

Nolan got up. "I'll go get the harp," he said.

Mama looked at him. "No, let Hans go get it. He can take the short cut and get it."

"I'll go," Nolan said.

Mama's eyes did not blink as she looked at him. "Hans can get it,"

she said. "I want to hear you all make music."

"I'll get it and hurry back," Nolan said talking quickly. His hands were trembling.

"Give me the quarters back then," Mama said to me. "I'll keep them."

I held the quarters tightly in my hand. I did not mean to give them to Nolan or to Mama. I wanted to buy the harp.

Nolan clenched his hands into fists and he sat again and stared into the fire. "Go get me the harp," he said finally with his voice dry as if it had been parched.

Mama sat with more mending. She smiled at me and at Nolan.

"You used to make good music on the harp," she told him. "That was before Hans was born. You made good music on the harp then."

Nolan turned his face toward her. His hands still were clenched into fists. But he smiled.

"I used to do a lot of things," he said.

Mama smiled at him. But I noticed that her hands were trembling.

"Tell Missy to come back to the fire," she told me then.

And I left them beside the fire and went through the dining room and into the kitchen so I could go out the back door.

Missy was standing beside the window near the stove. She turned and stared at me and her face was solid.

"Where're you going?" she asked.

"To get Nolan a harp," I told her.

"A harmonica," she said.

"A harp," I said.

"It's according to what you came from — and what you are — whether it's a harp or a harmonica," she said. Her face still was solid like

a block of ice.

"No matter, it's a harp," I said.

"Make sure you get a harp," she said. And then she turned back to the window as if she had forgotten that I was standing there, and I did not say that Mama had asked her to go back to the fire.

For I did not care. I did not care at all as I slammed the back door behind me and took one step across

the porch and into the yard and jumped the fence (with a hand on the post) instead of going through the gate. I ran down the road to town; I would buy the harp for Nolan and come back, and I would play my guitar and he would blow the harp and together we would make music; for Nolan had played a harp (Mama said) and made good music a long time ago, before I was born.

Kronos

● Faye Chilcote Walker

On pinnacles of pain,
Before the earth was born
Of sea, before the sea,
Time stood as one forlorn
In space correlative,
Nor saw, but felt (as shapes
Unliving, from no tomb)
That which no death escapes.

Eager the light grass bent
Where no grass ever grew
To let him pass, who lived
Not ever that he knew;
One neither dispossessed,
Possessed, of shape, of breath,
Attended at no rite
Of either birth or death.

O not alone because
Of him in him did birth —
As theory — produce
The heaven that is earth!
But Time's alone to know,
Who cannot cease to be,
His oneness with the cause
That shapes futurity.

The Indifferent Wind

● H. E. Francis

W O H, WHAT a day!" Bella cried, flinging the window up. The curtains blew into the room. Her hands caught out ecstatically at the warmth of the sun. And above, a gull swooped suddenly, glided into her vision, carrying it down to old Adolf Beideman, the town gravedigger, mowing his lawn next door.

"Oh, Ma!" she cried, so that Adolf, stopping as if she had said it to him, almost caught sight of her as she jerked evasively into the room. "Just the day for Helinski's hop. I *knew* the day would be perfect, and the forecast says fine all night long."

An assent, half laughter — half grunt, came from the breakfast table as Ma Dombroski rose and carried her heavy self to the sink, with the dishes.

"And Eric? Eric came?"

"Oh yes! — last night." Bella sprayed out her pleasure like perfume. The woman, leaning heavily against the sink, breathed deep with the early morning comfort of a loose body hanging girdleless without shape.

"But just for the week end," she added, "so I'm glad it's a perfect day — just for us."

"Ha! Like fire — the young." The woman laughed, turning in time to catch Bella streak a comet of diaphanous blue across the room. Ah, the new dress . . . There were here yards of time, yards of life, Ma's long hours at the old Singer sewing machine . . .

"Like I wait for Papa," Ma said, catching her dead Stefan suddenly in the bend of a plant in the morning wind, how years ago he had come down this street, how she had told it all to her Mama: That fisherman Dombroski, Mama; so tall, dark, eyes brown like the cow, and so warm. A big man in a long dark coat and his collar so high and white and clean. His tie so tight, Mama, and him so choking that I laugh. Oh, how I laugh, Mama!

How clearly she saw Stefan standing there in her mind! And she laughed at him now.

"Oh, Ma, it's so wonderful. Can you know? Can you?" Bella ranged the woman's face with quick egoism before twirling obliviously, tightly clinging to the dress. "Eric's so wonderful!" She crushed the dress close, smothering Eric to her breast forever and ever, his honey-streaked hair under her nose, the angular face under her moving fingers, the long athletic stretch of him on the grass —

"It's only for a week and so we've got to make the most of it. And God's helping us. Well He *is*!" She laughed at her mother's intolerant glance at such unholy mention.

"Is good," the woman said, thrusting her hands into the dish water with a noisy clatter that erased Bella's noisy running up the stairs; but beyond was the persistent whirr of old Adolf's mower somewhere on the lawn.

"Who'll be there?" Bella called

down, knowing perfectly well who would come, yet so unwilling to break the morning's magic, already seeing morning turned night and that nondescript world of Eric close as breath again, the world he always carried back to college, away from her.

"Ach — like always, everybody. Who you think be there!"

But of course Bella wouldn't see *them*. Eric would be the whole party. Life! Life! — it vibrated through her as if the hop had begun — swaying lanterns, whirling bodies, floor and ceiling flung up-down up-down as she polkaed in perfect time with Eric stomp-stomping louder and louder, harder and harder —

Laughter burst in the kitchen below.

She leaned forward, listening —

"Ma?" she called down the stairway. There was a clank of pans.

"Is nothing." And the laughter died. Ma talking to herself. Ma getting old. The mumbles and the snickers — especially when there was a hop or wedding with much cooking, ripples of excitement among women over back fences, stirring something deep in the self that a woman never forgot, making it somehow her own day too.

So Ma whipped the yolks into flour, beating batter for the cake for the hop. If her laughter faded, the smile remained — for she had seen Stefan. And she couldn't forget him. She never could on the big days of births and weddings, anniversaries and — ah, yes, even then — funerals. So she talked aloud. She did not know when *that* had first happened, but it had become a habit, so that she chatted as if he were there, actually, believing that perhaps if you thought

he was, he was — wasn't that so?

Beaten smooth, the batter flowed into the buttered pan. She set it in the oven, wondering: Should wear black? Stefan not long dead — wear black? But it was almost a year. Though even with her routine now changed, with Bella perhaps to marry soon, it did not seem a year, for Stefan was everywhere in her work, so that touching this (a tin), closing the oven door (that stove bought after how many years in this new place they had come to), she did not lose him even in death. But there remained a space, an emptiness — maybe like that of Miss Elkins, who had told her she had a space where her kidney was removed that gave her pains sometimes. Only her own was a space that moved sometimes from her heart up to her head and then down. She never knew where it would come — or when.

"Wear black?" she said aloud, but hearing Bella's singing and her steps in flighty dance on the floor, she decided, "No. Black not right color for dance with many gay people so bright."

Outside, the mower stopped. The sudden stillness made her aware that all the time she had been listening to its sleepy drone. And now with it dead, though for a moment hesitant, she obeyed her first impulse — to set down the dish towel and the glass and go to the window. But suppose Adolf saw her watching? Cautiously she stood a short distance from the window. Worse — suppose Bella saw her? She dared not think what Bella might say. Yet how many times of late she had done this! Even at times when she was thinking so strongly of Stefan — like now. Why she did

it, she did not rightly understand — and it made guilt and shame. Yet she looked. She peered now . . .

He was bending to pick up his shirt and jacket. How sunbrowned dark he was, and there was no fat on his tall body. Whole man, she thought, and sixty-two now, with hard body — maybe because mowing and digging graves, and riding bicycle every day to cemetery. And there — on his head was the same old captain's hat, gray; and he still wore the same baggy-kneed pants, hung low-waisted, and those dirt-encrusted shoes. Beneath that hat Ma knew the thick head of gray-white hair well, thicker yet than most men's these days, and the mournfully long face with its jolly redness and the mouth that could laugh the corners of his eyes shut.

"Stefan," she said. As if that call would drive the sight of Adolf from the window or out of her mind if she turned away! For there was something about the living (terrible, she felt) that drove the dead away. First Stefan in her head; then in a minute, even while talking to Stefan, Adolf came pushing Stefan out, changing him — like Stefan lost all fat, she thought, got young. For Stefan had grown almost obese, and as he sat Sundays on the porch, had enjoyed roping his hands around his grossness, slapping it, joking about it. She laughed. Like Stefan young again!

And she felt young again too. Each time looking out, she felt so much youngness come into her. What that means? she asked herself. What it means to feel sudden young — like Bella, young? Ach . . . Bella.

Her eyes dropped, tired, and closed, blurring out Stefan, the little

world of that man across the way. And the old worry came again: Not mention that man Adolf to Bella.

"Adolf!" Bella would cry. "Why, he's a dirty old man!" — the plight of all bachelors in this forsaken fishing town. "You ever seen his house, Ma — *inside* it, I mean? If he kept the inside half so good as the outside, it'd be something."

"Inside? No. Since his mother die, no," turning away, her eyes resting forlornly on that house beyond. Inside? How she would like to get her hands on the inside, to scrape and clean, to clear away trash and make that house like new.

"He never makes his beds, just throws down the covers and doesn't use sheets. John said he was in there before he went back to college and you could scrape grease an inch thick from the china-closet glass — and you couldn't even see the real colors of the linoleum or the oil-cloth on the table either. And I won't *try* to describe the smells he mentioned!"

But no matter how much she felt of grief for Adolf, who had lost his mother so many years before, or how deep was her own desire to clean for him (so much sometimes that her big hands fidgeted as if feeling cloth and water, bucket and mop), there was her love for Bella, who did not like Adolf, who had no sympathy for old bachelors, though Bella was good, liked this town, and wanted only the decent life with her college Eric home again and a house with babies and a car and what was good. And what else was there? So Ma said nothing. She cleaned her house. All day long she cleaned sometimes, without once looking through that forbidden window into the yard beyond. Yet she could not

close the window of her mind, and often, bending over the floor with the brush in her hand, she looked into that house as it once was . . . and now saw it grimed with lonely living, untouched from habit and maybe from the lonely love for things as his mother had once had them. His mother . . . Ach, she thought, always the dead come —

She shook herself free with a violent jerk of the faucet that shot water noisily into the last pan, then wiped it and set it with a clatter in the closet. Noisily she set the dishes away. She unwound her apron and lumbered her heavy body with loud dragging scuffle across the floor.

"Bella!" she cried up the stairs, taking a quick last glance out the window, cautious —

"Yeah, Ma?"

"You got dress ready? Come!" she cried, moving quickly with guilt away from the window.

But Adolf had seen her. The head which now and then had been seen in the window disappeared. So she has finished her work in the kitchen, he thought, not daring to think anything else, for behind him was his house, and over it all, in it, was a life which had never included her. But what was he to do at sixty-two with this new thing that hovered near him — yes, even hovered at times like a menace. It made him (who had sat here in thirteen years of solitude with only the men from the boats and his beer and his accordion for company) suddenly unsteady, as if he were back on those rolling ship-decks. Even this solid land with its beautiful spread of apple trees, its three sheds and the house of his own parents trem-

bled inside him. He was frightened. Nevertheless, he sat there. At certain times he sat there deliberately. And at such times some apprehension created an emptiness; something of comfort went out from under his apple tree, away from the little round table with its crony chairs, and beer itself could not bring back his ease, and the sad sight of so many empty bottles only intensified the emptiness around him.

But today there would be the hop. His German soul smiled. Yes, the hop; he laughed. And he would go too. Yes, he would be there and with his accordion he would make the most jolly music and the loudest, and everyone for many miles around would come and say, "You should have been there to see old Adolf Beideman playing that accordion — like never before." Then they would remind the whole neighborhood for miles around of old Maria Beideman's son, Adolf, how he used to play with that old woman beside him, stopping and starting him, "Again, Adolf — again!" and then her scrimping for pennies so he could take lessons and she could sit with pride over such music, the best in the whole of this county.

Like already sitting at the hop, he could feel his foot beat time and his fingers race over the keys. His blood quickened. The smile returned, driving the pall away. He rose, giddy with memory and anticipation, and collected his beer-carrying basket to go to Kinley's Market for more.

But leaving the yard, he stopped to look up at the empty window and thought the thought he had been hiding: She will be there. A big, clean woman with thick hands, all

shined with clean-smelling brightness and starched stiff, with always a smile and greeting for the world.

So they were at the party already, and he was playing, and everyone was dancing — until the storebell announcing him rang the whole hop out of his head, and setting the basket on Kinley's counter, he asked for "Four quarts, please."

By six o'clock Adolf Beideman had drunk four quarts of beer. Gaily he stared through the glass that yellowed the world bright. He blinked through redding eyes.

In the early afternoon (two beers gone), Eric Selden, coming out of Dombroski's, stopped to see him. Adolf offered him beer, but he refused.

"I only drink hard liquor," Eric said.

Setting the bottle down, Adolf looked at him. After a minute or two Eric said he had to dress for the hop, he'd better go now. Adolf nodded. He watched Eric get into his car and drive away. For a long time he watched where the car had been. Then he sat there and drank.

Twice, after, he waved to Mrs. Dombroski as she came and went with the big cake for the hop.

"Hi, Katherine," he said.

"Hello," she replied quietly.

"Eric came to see me. We had a good talk," he said.

"Good. So good," she said, disappearing behind the house.

A child sent a high-pitched scream down the street. Bella Dombroski, clad in a Japanese kimono, scooped slip, panties and handkerchiefs off the line.

Cars zoomed on the main highway beyond, droning toward New York.

When the dying sun threw gaunt shadows gropingly on the ground, a shrill waking scream sounded from the town whistle — six o'clock. Soon, down the street came Andersons, Kioskis, Osteds. A neighbor, running back to the house, called after little Miss Elkins, "Wait! Wait! I forgot the fudge!"

Life rose in the neighborhood and congregated, like phantoms from a grave come out for wild midnight merrymaking.

A Kioski boy cycling by cried out, "Hurry, Adolf, they're eating already."

And Adolf Beideman strapped on his accordion, and ambling with comfortable unsteadiness, strolled out of the yard.

"Look, everybody — it's Eric!"

"Hi, Mrs. Helinski!"

Before he had time to see the crowd break, greeting him, he felt her hand in his. "Eric, my boy — you *did* come," she pressed. And he blushed — but from what? That was not like him — and he became intensely conscious of the tight closeness of Bella, who clung to him with a kind of nervous pleasure. Buried deep in the noise and yelling, he laughed it all off, wriggled away, and finally guided Bella out into the middle of the barn when someone yelled "Polka!" The tuners struck up, and he and Bella glided out free and clear across the floor. They had escaped. But was that what he meant — *escaped*?

And how small the barn seemed! He had remembered it spread so large on such days, like the whole world around them. He pitched faster —

"Eric, look out!" Bella warned, but despite it they collided with Les

Drinkwater.

"Sorry, Les," Eric cried. But Les nudged him, "It's O.K., Eric. Barn's tight, big crowd, tipsy music." He laughed.

"Yeah." It came out weak, and he felt embarrassment, then anger at himself for the formality that had overcome him for a moment and which he had sent to Les. Did Les notice? Well, Eric could not help that. After all, they had to expect some change in him.

"Eric?" Bella's face, pert, dipped into his reverie, imitating him facetiously, like his own image reflected under him.

"Do I look *that* far away?" he asked.

"Farther," she said, but drew him closer as they whizzed past Mrs. Dombroski seated next to — of all people! — Adolf Beideman, she thought.

"Ma! — Oh, Ma!" she waved joyously, spinning past into the bobbing clusters of couples —

"My daughter, she dance beautiful," Ma said confidentially to Adolf.

"Yes," he said. He enjoyed her leaning close, bending to imply a kind of intimacy, a secretiveness he had not shared with anyone for how long? Thirteen years. Thirteen years his mother was dead. And now this woman whom he had known for so long, a friend now distant with the propriety of death, whose husband he had worked beside, fishing, crabbing, working the seasons away — she had slowly grown closer with some reminder of a world gone. He did not know exactly how to say it, though it came occasionally under the apple tree, in the house, or stopping in

that field of the dead where he talked to the tombstones or the sinking mounds. He had even made friends — he chuckled — with those stones, talking to those under them that he had known. He smiled, raised his hand, wanting to tell her that just at that moment he had experienced something rare, something —

But quick, he added, "You dance too now and then, perhaps?"

"No. Since Stefan die . . ." she inserted hastily, not in displeasure, but with propriety once more.

"You know —" He drew close, pleased that she did not draw away, but bent expectantly, with her own pleasure. "I never told anyone before. In the cemetery . . . I . . . talk to myself, all alone . . ."

"Talk to self!" She laughed. So she was making fun of him!

"Yes," he uttered in trepidation.

"You? You!"

"Yes." The floor of his stomach sagged miserably.

"I too! Yes — I!" she cried, slapped his knee and burst into a frenzy of high-pitched laughter. Then the picture of it struck him: He, Adolf, and that woman too, both talking to themselves — Ha!

Oh, how happy! If he could feel this again and again — to hold this joy for good, and never be without such comfort inside him. And oh, she was big, she held as much of womanhood and pleasure and generosity even as she held of flesh. It was not too impossible: he could get along so easy with her. Ah, the times he had dared to think it, sitting with beer, in his years-old clothes needing mending, and behind him his house that every night of his life he went back into alone, filling the empty rooms with his

accordion music, and then to lie down in sheetless beds and wake up into that dingy bleakness, and in dreary months to wait for spring and summer to escape outdoors under the big sky — alas, only to discover that it hovered there, bigger and more menacing!

Yet now it seemed so easy: Mrs. Dombroski lived only across the street; she need not come far into his new world; her own world would not change much; he would grow more full with her, whole at last.

Now — while she laughs and there is dancing and music and the air lives, he will ask, he will dare to say, *Now is the time to dance, when the life is in you, and all the living are showing what it is to live.*

He rose, giddy with the boldness of it. Red-faced, he stood before her, his eyes smiling with a watery happiness. He stood straight with pride as he spoke.

"Katherine," he said, but he got no farther. He was seized, swung by the arms of Swen Osted and thrust into the group.

"Let's have it, Adolf!"

Shouts of "Adolf! Adolf!" filled the barn. They caught him up bodily and set him down with the musicians as he cried, "I'll be back. Wait!" to Ma Dombroski.

She nodded, content — more content than she had been this whole year. His thinking of her like that! Wait for him? Why, yes — wait all evening long. To talk so fine to someone, at last, and with him she had been longing to sit beside, to touch without hands that life so near to hear. Wait? Yes, the whole long evening — for who ever heard of Adolf playing one song only? No, he would play the night away,

but it was good to know he *wanted* to come back. So let him play and play! She would be happy here waiting — like flying, like must feel a bird, she thought.

But she nudged her own leg with her big hand. "Fool," she said. "Big fool." For it was all real, only a hop in a barn, where she knew everybody and could talk all night with friends and be so content watching Adolf play the accordion and her own child Bella dancing with her Eric . . .

But as she and Eric danced, Bella became increasingly aware that his stiff arm pitched up and down, up and down, not with carefree grace and zest, but with an effort that often caused her to jump in half step, to writhe suddenly into his rhythm without easy adaptation, without that pattern they had always known, easy, flaring, and constant.

And to all her questions — Do they work you hard up there? What's it like, really? You look so tired, and you're not so easy — what is it? Can't I know, Eric? — he merely smiled and squeezed her hand, but immediately lapsed into the studied seriousness of one who has forgotten, who has reached out without energy to grasp a pattern inevitably slipped out of.

"I used to tell you," he said, knowing before it was out that it was no longer to be believed, "that anything was worth it if there was someone to believe in you."

"Oh, Eric." His words inspired an evanescence that made her soften, yet the sight of her face in that swirl of blue motion, unaffectedly simple, the sheen of brown hair, the milky cleanliness of soaped skin, of something fresh and whole-

some made him feel she was—he dared not think the word—rustic.

Still he had dared say those words to her, "If there was someone to believe in you," with a distinct feeling of treachery, as if to say, "You can ascribe these words to yourself if you want to, Bella." Now more than ever it was evident that those words were said in another time and another place and by so different a person. To himself he said, *Look at her. Tell her.* But he could not. He looked over her, yet he felt her. Surely *she* too felt *his* clumsiness. For this Polka business was not his pattern. How would he explain that to her? Was a man to say, "I've changed my style. I can't dance right with you anymore. Do you know, Bella, what that means?" He was slow. After all, he had planned all week, even sitting there in Mrs. Dombroski's parlor this afternoon, how he would tell her in as few words as possible what a gigantic monster college was that had taken him in its arms and soothed him into submission so that he too became a real part of it, alienated from Bella, but something he did not—indeed! *could not*—tear away from. Well, *tell her!* he commanded.

In answer he merely projected himself more swiftly into that other world where Bella was replaced by a lithe, quiet-moving creature of darkness in hair and eye and in feeling and motion, whose very words created a host of unspoken feelings and thoughts juxtaposed, which became promises, revelations, facts even, all giving to Bella a certain emptiness. But that was not all: how could he ever transport Bella into that world which the fraternity encompassed, the loyalties

the school had gorged him with, fattened his pride with, claiming him as a son who had stepped out of their vision for a moment only, to go home, to become so aware of his own luster, and to find the town, all (now, looking at Bella, it was true, and even as he thought it, he knew he could never deny it again)—dingy.

Such a look came over him at the thought that, looking up at him, Bella winced. No, she would not forget that look. No, she felt, I couldn't have been right! But all her young agony sprang up in her muddled senses. She braced herself.

"What is it, Eric?" she asked, afraid of understanding it, knowing that something she had feared all evening was about to happen. She found no word to describe it, no act to picture it. Only slowly—something was happening; someone was pulling a dark shade down over a morning window.

He did not reply.

"Eric! You're not even listening!"

"What?"

"Oh, Eric, what's the matter?"

Immediately she regretted asking. For he stopped dancing. She faltered, hanging close to him. "Eric?" she said, probing, hurt by his quiet stare. The time was now, she knew. Something had happened—there at school where she couldn't see it, and she did not know what to do.

"Bella—" He had to be firm—for he had the vision clear, and he would not let it go: Lina, and the boys, the clomp-clomps, claps, the hands across the table, the still candles held in hands that spoke fidelity . . . And Lina and life, life—bleeding full . . . "I've got to talk to you," he said. His voice was artfully firm and the grey

of his eye was unflinching.

Ma, who had so carefully followed their lilt and sway, reveling in her own self there in the person of Bella — even she, closing her eyes as if to recapture the world gone, missed them as they moved across the floor and disappeared.

Opening her eyes, she sought Adolf. For the song had ended. At the moment he was not playing. The musicians were joking among themselves. But not Adolf. He seemed piqued. His accordion hung loose. His weather-beaten face frowned. Then it fell lax, unwrinkling loosely in a listless mourn, his face long, the circles hollowed deep.

Oh, how she could have ejected Bella then! A woman got live, she thought, a man got feel good too! Ah, if she could, now, just now, stretch her hands out and in that brief instant touch him as so often she had wanted to! And surely Adolf knew that — yes: how they had tried with each other, sat side by side, talked over the fence, in the kitchen, both knowing — But how to speak? Who to speak first? Why — Why he can't help, she thought, bitter of a sudden — do his part too? Determinedly she rose. She moved closer to the musicians. They were preparing to play. They no longer joked. Surely he would see her now, look this way. She sat close, against the wall, near enough to talk to him and, if she rose slightly, to touch him.

But in his annoyance Adolf did not see her. He was preoccupied with Bella — she could at least be friendly. There was no need to pass him without speaking, nodding. Wasn't it enough that it was she who stood between him and Kath-

erine? As if a man didn't know! She was like that fence between houses — no matter where he and that woman stood, always she was there between them. Children! They have so much to learn, they should be told, how each has a life not to be pushed out, and Katherine has the right too!

Besides, what was wrong with him? A bachelor? — but a bachelor known all her life, good family, no trouble, always respectable. Yes, *he* knew. Once he had offered Bella the first ripe apple of the year. Did she take it? No, she only turned from him and said, "Thanks, I like my apples cooked." And how could you face that?

"Let's go, Adolf!" The tap on his shoulder brought him up. He shook off the stare, blinking.

"Let's have it, boys, 'The Laughing Polka,'" someone shrieked. Behind, a foot struck time. They suddenly swooped into the music. It hit out thunder in the barn.

Adolf's fingers clapped onto the keys — sharp, quick, light. His head bobbed, then his shoulders. Slowly the anger fell away, his fingers glided, his feet clapped, his blood beat with a tremendous effervescing surge. He shook all over now, deep in the rhythm; his smile grew; and his eyes twinkled laughter. And there he was — sitting under that apple tree again, happy, and he had everything back, as always when he used to play: *she* was there, his life was full, and in this moment of vision he needed nothing, no one in the whole world, so he struck harder and harder, faster and faster, bursting, into broad, ecstatic laughter —

"Mama," he whispered. "Mama. Mama . . ."

How *can* they laugh and dance so? Bella wanted to cry out, but not to Eric. She would reveal nothing to him. She stood proudly still. But her hands clutched the thin wire fence; they gripped it tight and she did not know what to say.

Finally she swung around to him. "You mean it, Eric? Do you really mean it? You don't want me anymore?"

"Don't put it that way, Bella. It sounds so — well, I don't mean it that way."

"But no matter what you say, that's what it is, isn't it?"

"Bella —"

"Well, isn't it?"

"Bella!" So she was going to be difficult, hysterical. Well, he'd foreseen that, though he wanted to avoid it.

"Isn't it, Eric?" Her pitch climbed, grating him.

"Yes, yes, then, if that's what you want me to say!" He turned in exasperation, moving with long strides across the lot.

"Eric!" she called desperately so that he stopped. "You can't!" she cried, running. "You can't, Eric. You just can't!" Maybe she was too young even to see that he was not young any longer, that it wasn't just a whim, that he *did* know what he wanted, and that it wasn't she. Maybe she was not up to hurt and shame and fear, feeling so awful, awful, in her own young feeling of sudden nakedness, fully clothed but so completely naked. "You can't!" she cried again, and without knowing it she lashed her hands up, struck at him and beat and beat and beat, until he thrust her down against the ground and she was kneeling in the tall grass which blew against her wet face, gasping

and choking in rage and shame and humiliation.

And when she looked up, staring through pained eyes, Eric was gone. Only the empty lot stretched out before her, the grass shimmering in the indifferent wind. But in her was a quiet more tumultuous than the thundering barn and a grief bigger than the open sky.

In the barn Ma lowered her unrevealing eyes. They fell on her hands, those great heavy hands lying so awkward and useless on her knees. What were they to do now? For what person would those hands work? She saw Adolf's happiness moving in his fingers over the keyboard, blossoming in his face — his own private treasure. Could she match that? No, not now. Though she felt joy for him — yes, for she wanted him happy — yet her hands notched up clumsily, holding nothing, then clasped each other. He not need me, she thought, never need me, need no woman now. Because always there would be the dead woman rising hauntingly to life in the music, the dead woman laughing down at her boy, and his reaching back, reaching . . .

I go back to kitchen, she decided — always to look out distantly from now on, to pour no beer with those hands, and move in that empty kitchen and have only wishes that would take her into that yard beyond. "Ach, the dead," she muttered.

She rose, seeing nothing, and made her way past the dancing couples and the seated spectators, and turned down the road into the open night.

At that instant Bella emerged from the darkness. She stood in the

outer edge of light, her vacant stare blotting up the spectacle of the hop. Then she caught sight of her mother. How slowly she moved! Her whole body rotated with a tired, sagging effort and her hands hung in forlorn indifference. She scuffed lazily, kicking up puffs of dust. Incredible, Bella watched the back bent like one no longer able to carry the world so pressing close. *Ma!* she whimpered, realizing some terrible kinship with her. She had no idea what it was, but she had never really seen the woman in *Ma* before. Now she saw her with a great burst of sympathy that plunged her deep into a sense of tragic joy. She gazed into the barn — and there was

Adolf, so happy. Yet she, Bella, could add to that happiness, destroy the barrier of herself thrown up before him. And in her own misery she ran into the barn, to Adolf, clasped his head between her hands, crying "Adolf! Oh, Adolf!" and kissed him richly on the cheek, then ran out of the barn down the street after *Ma*.

A few blocks away a car engine stopped, but the young man did not leave the car immediately. He sat smoking freely until the cigarette glow died. Then he got out and slammed the door, sighing easefully. "What a beautiful night it must be on campus," he said.

Conflict

● Lori Petri

Here a behemoth, waxing gross, astride
A battle-wagon, bombs in both his hands,
With fuddled multitudes on every side,
Before the vast plain of the future stands.
Opposing him is one in godhood's role,
Carrying scrolls of truth gleaned from the stars,
With whispers of humanity's high role
Circling among his gathered avatars.

Why does not one or the other wane or nod,
And bring dominion into prescient view?
But batten monster and ascendant god
Increase apace beneath impartial blue.
When will the trumpet call to conflict sound,
And who shall stand, and who lie on the ground?

Bat, Snail and Mole

● Jocelyn Macy Sloan

They partition it — bat, snail and mole.

Bat commands the upper part.
Slicing twilight with accurate wings,
gauging his path with a splintering voice,
he observes the unseen. There are others but
bat alone is the cosmic explorer.

Snail inherits the in-between.
High priest of worshipful morning,
of evening-revealed, in shimmering quiet,
he listens to silence. Though there are others,
only snail remains calm as he contemplates space,
deciphers it during his shell-meditation.

Then there's mole reigning beneath,
engineering his halls through whispering roots,
his pulse clocking earth's. In that infinite womb
he endures serenely. None of the rest
like blind-lighted mole can interpret the darkness.

Bat, snail and mole — they partition it.

Night Watch

● Donald H. Letendre

Beyond the hunched dunes
on the outermost jut of shore
the solitary watcher
patrols the edge of his continent.
As of no time, no place —
a mere unit
guyed to a trinity
of roiling sea and wheeling land
and constellated sky —
he eyes the rimless night,
records an undisturbed perspective —
shorelong, seadeep, skywide —
and patiently awaits
the transfiguration into morning.

Contributors

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